

# Companies step up recruitment of U.S. vets

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Frank Miranda, a former Army master sergeant who served in Afghanistan, showed one of his medals while at work in Home Depot in Totowa, N.J., on Nov. 26, 2013. Photo: Mitsu Yasukawa/The Record/MCT

It took veteran Francisco “Frank” Miranda about three years to find a job in the civilian world that was a good fit when he returned from the war in Afghanistan. Since August, Miranda has been working at Home Depot in Totowa, N.J., where he and two fellow vet employees refer to each other by their former military ranks.

“That’s the respect that we give each other,” said Miranda, a 50-year-old Woodland Park, N.J., resident. “They call me by saying, ‘Hey, master sergeant.’”

Home Depot is one of a number of companies that have stepped up their efforts to recruit U.S. military veterans, helping ex-service members such as Miranda who have struggled to find work and to adjust to life back home. The chain of home-improvement stores employs 35,000 veterans, around 10 percent of its workforce. It has committed to hire about 55,000 vets over the next five years.

And Home Depot isn’t the only business that’s looking to beef up its staff, and find innovative ways beyond job fairs, to connect with veterans.

## **Hunting For Work**

This year, Wal-Mart Stores Inc. pledged to hire every veteran who wanted a job and who had left the service in the prior year.

Horizon Blue Cross Blue Shield of New Jersey agreed to test out a new program aimed at matching the health insurance company with veterans to hire. Power company PSE&G participated in a similar program. Disabled vets handled customer calls following Superstorm Sandy last year.

And last month, the White House unveiled "Warriors 4 Wireless," a program seeking to place 5,000 vets in jobs in the wireless telecom industry by 2015.

Alex Leniw, a 33-year-old Garfield, N.J., man who served 10 years in the Coast Guard, knows firsthand how hard it can be for a veteran to get a job. When he got out of the service, he attended Caldwell College for two years and graduated. For a year since then, he has been hunting for work.

"It's just so frustrating," Leniw said. "The economy's not helping. I had my resume on Monster.com for a while, and that went nowhere. Every job I'm applying for, there's over 100 other applicants."

## **Employers Eager To Hire Vets**

Veterans returning to civilian life have new battles to fight on the home front. They face a competitive job market; are sometimes emotionally challenged by the transition from the military; and they often lack the ability to explain and translate how their military skills can benefit an employer.

Nationally, unemployment for veterans has been trending down, falling to 7 percent last year from 8.7 percent in 2010.

"Most of the employers are very eager to hire veterans," said New Jersey Labor Commissioner Harold Wirths. "I always tell them not only morally is it the correct thing to do, but economically it's great. You're getting a highly skilled employee. You don't have to worry about telling them how to dress. They come to work on time. They're used to harsh conditions."

Wirths also said younger ex-service members often go to college under the GI Bill and are therefore counted as unemployed. That can skew veteran unemployment figures, he said, including in New Jersey, where the unemployment rate for veterans was 10 percent last year. At job fairs, the commissioner said, he is seeing many Vietnam War-era vets, who are in the 50- to 60-year-age range, seeking work.

Miranda is in that age bracket. He spent 27 years in the U.S. Army, serving in places such as Afghanistan and Kuwait, before retiring in October 2010. The transition took an emotional toll on him, Miranda said.

“It was a big adjustment,” he said. “It was overwhelming not having that responsibility of commanding and being responsible for soldiers.”

## **Holding Job Fairs**

Miranda worked briefly for a supermarket, and eventually applied online for a job at Home Depot. Now he works about 25 to 30 hours a week, in the appliance department and “doing the racetrack,” running from department to department to help customers.

At Home Depot, Miranda said he has a chance to advance and is working for a company that shares the same values of the Army — such as loyalty, duty, respect and service.

“We really have been proactive trying to recruit military,” said Pam Frazier, human relations manager for the Home Depot district where Miranda works.

Home Depot holds its own job fairs for veterans at its stores. It has a “military skills translator” on its website to help veterans explain how their military experience can be applied at the chain, she said.

“We are looking for knowledgeable, hard-working, solution-based experience, and of course customer service is a definite plus,” Frazier said. “We really targeted military veterans because they tend to stay with you.”

## Quiz

- 1 Which detail from the article BEST supports the central idea?
  - (A) "The economy's not helping. I had my resume on Monster.com for a while, and that went nowhere."
  - (B) "That's the respect that we give each other," said Miranda. "They call me by saying, 'Hey, master sergeant.'"
  - (C) Nationally, unemployment for veterans has been trending down, falling to 7 percent last year from 8.7 percent in 2010.
  - (D) Wirths also said younger ex-service members often go to college under the GI Bill and are therefore counted as unemployed.
  
- 2 Select the paragraph from "Employers Eager To Hire Vets" that states the reason why the number of unemployed veterans is distorted.
  
- 3 What would be a good alternate title for the section titled "Holding Job Fairs"?
  - (A) From Groceries To Hardware
  - (B) Home Depot On A Hiring Spree
  - (C) Military Skills Prove Useful For Retail
  - (D) Supermarkets: A Hit With Veterans
  
- 4 Which sentence is MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
  - (A) Veterans returning to civilian life have new battles to fight on the home front.
  - (B) When he got out of the service, he attended Caldwell College for two years and graduated.
  - (C) Nationally, unemployment for veterans has been trending down, falling to 7 percent last year from 8.7 percent in 2010.
  - (D) Miranda is in that age bracket. He spent 27 years in the U.S. Army, serving in places such as Afghanistan and Kuwait, before retiring in October 2010.